Student Perceptions of Academic Effort in Applied Science Courses

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Many applied science programs such as exercise science include prerequisite courses in the basic sciences to provide students with knowledge of foundational principles as well as provide transfer pathways from biology. However, when students begin exercise science coursework, their perceptions are that these courses should be easier, expecting lower effort and higher academic grades. These mismatched perceptions often lead to academic frustration. To determine the validity of the perceptions of high vs. low academic effort and academic success in basic vs. applied sciences, the researchers examined the final course grades between an introductory biology course and an introductory exercise science course across multiple cohorts. The researchers hypothesized that students who attained a high letter grade in an introductory biology course would also attain a high grade in the introductory exercise science course. The researchers requested grade data from the Institutional Effectiveness Office from years 2018-2019. A total of 25 student grades were included in data analyses. To determine the level of agreement between the two courses, the researchers conducted a Kappa coefficient analysis. Based on the results, the two course produce similar grades (Kappa=0.589, p < 0.001), supporting the researchers’ hypothesis that the two introductory courses are similar in academic effort and grading. The results of this pilot study can be used to improve learning outcomes in exercise science programs by providing faculty with a more comprehensive understanding of the preparedness of students enrolling in their program based on prerequisite coursework.

*Keywords: Academic Success, Academic Rigor, Applied Science Programs, Academic Effort*